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**The State of Representation:**  
**The News Media and the Construction of Political Community**

### *Abstract*

International relations theory's study of the norms of international society has typically focused on their construction by elite groups through diplomatic practice and academic discourse. In the process, IR theory neglects the importance of news media representations in creating the norms of political community that shape conceptions of political possibility in everyday interactions. This is an important area of investigation; the manner in which national societies are constructed and granted moral meaning has resonances in the range of political actions publics will support and their sense of moral obligation. This paper will outline the manner in which IR could approach such research from a critical perspective. It asserts that the meaning of representations must take into account the status of media as a social product. The authority invested in the media lends its representations legitimacy as fact. The picture of the world conveyed by the media appears as natural and immutable. Oriented towards national markets, the news media assumes the nation as its audience, constructing the nation as a territorially bound entity distinct from other communities. The cultures of news journalism work to reinforce this process through their conservatism and disposition to the status quo. A case study investigation of the American news media's representation of Operation Restore Hope from December 1992 to May 1993 will draw out these aspects of media representation. The causal narrative of the failure of the Somali state is explained in terms of human agency, neglecting the role of structural factors in the collapse of the state. Tying together the meaning suggested by the news media's presentation and inability to trace social and historical complexities, the final aspect of the work will note that the news media presents states as Hegelian expressions of ethical community. The news media thereby works to reinforce systems of exclusion in international society on an everyday level.

# 1

## Introduction

The importance accorded to norms in the discipline of International Relations has grown considerably in scope and importance in the past 30 years.<sup>1</sup> The impact of traditionalist, constructivist and critical approaches in IR has added depth and sophistication to explanations of world politics in danger of succumbing to an outdated economistic model of the social sciences.<sup>2</sup> However, across the vast theoretical and normative divides separating these approaches is a shared emphasis on the role of elites, international organizations, diplomatic practice and political theory in constituting these norms.<sup>3</sup> While undoubtedly an important aspect of IR, this focus on the elite level of norm construction and functioning has neglected the role of everyday, 'common sense' norms and values in constructing the horizons of international political theory and action. This is a crucial area of exploration for IR, and particularly for critical approaches in IR. Investigating the manner in which these values are constituted in our lifeworlds draws out how we conceive of the dominant form of political community - the state - and subsequently international society on a daily basis in the public sphere.<sup>4</sup> Addressing the

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter the academic discipline of International Relations will be denoted as 'IR'.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Smith, 'Positivism and Beyond', in Ken Booth, Steve Smith and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): pp. 17-20; Friedrich Kratochwil notes that even the foremost expositor of this model, Kenneth Waltz, is centrally concerned with norms in his work. See Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms and Decisions: On the Conditions of practical and legal reasoning in international relations and domestic affairs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> For an outline of the traditionalist approach, see Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): Chapter 13. Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) provide examples of this tendency from a critical perspective.

<sup>4</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: The Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987): pp. 132-133. Jennifer Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods', *European Journal of International Relations* 5 (1999): p. 35. Rare examples of such research are Michael J. Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) and David Campbell, 'Cultural governance and pictorial resistance: reflections on the imaging of war', *Review of International Studies* 29 (2003) 2003.

problems of systems of exclusion, domination, and repression present in international society, and contemplating the transformation of political community towards a post-Westphalian notion of emancipation through a politics of discourse, requires questioning the construction of political values in our daily activities, the concern with ‘real people in real places’ that is the hallmark of immanent critique.<sup>5</sup>

News media representations -the production of meaning in which journalism is engaged- are important in the creation of pictures of the way the world works.<sup>6</sup> The centrality of the media in constituting, reconstituting and diffusing norms and values has led one author to write that ‘Along with professional historians and schools, the mass media have become the most effective and least acknowledged institutional vehicles for shaping historical consciousness.’<sup>7</sup> Representation of the world in the public sphere through the devices of media narration and the manner in which the media constructs relationships between objects and subjects, events and outcomes, helps determine how we conceive of political organization. Meaning undoubtedly is a complex negotiation between the social production of representation, the text, and the audience which allows for a tremendous variety of interpretations, and one must be careful not to suggest a ‘hypodermic needle’ theory of media into IR. However, the variety of possible interpretations is not endless, as it relies on sedimented intersubjective agreement to constitute intelligible meaning. The centrality of the media in conveying information about the world, and the authority with which the news media is invested, gives media narratives substantial weight. In this work I will attempt to address how the media constructs the state in order to outline the moral values we attribute to the state in the discourse of the public sphere. This discussion will trace the production and presentation of media narratives, their centrality in conveying meaning, and relate them to the main theories of the state in Western political thought to outline the ethical values these representations suggest, while acknowledging that such a project is necessarily limited to a sketch given the restrictions of this work.

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998): pp. 206-207; Ken Booth, ‘Beyond Critical Security Studies’ in Ken Booth (ed) *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005): pp. 272-275.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television and Journalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1996): pp. 1-3; John Hartley, *Understanding News* (London: Routledge, 1982): pp. 5-6, 104. Kevin Williams, *Understanding Media Theory* (London: Hodder Headline 2003): p. 121.

<sup>7</sup> Anton Kaes, quoted in Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies*, p.124.

Norms of political community are vital in outlining political moral obligations to ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. The manner in which we distribute membership is the primary means of moral differentiation and the allocation of social, economic and political resources rides on the back of this distribution.<sup>8</sup> How the state is presented encourages a reading of borders as constituting a boundary enclosing an ethical community which necessarily excludes others in order to maintain its value, or as the functional boundary of a community of individuals bound by consent. Either view indicates a moral stance on political boundaries that influences acceptable ranges of political actions in the international arena. Addressing these meanings in media representation moves well beyond the esoteric discussions of academics. This is readily apparent in Western democracies in which the need for public support for foreign policy goals is viewed as crucial.<sup>9</sup> How the public views its obligations to those outside its boundaries will help determine its support for policies stretching from aid and trade to intervention, warfare, and nation-building, and in turn the ability of governments to pursue those policies successfully.

The primary focus will be upon the role of the American print media in constructing norms and values about political community for an American audience. The discussion is divided into three parts. The first section will examine some current approaches to representation in IR theory. I will argue that these approaches fail to consider representation as a social product. As a social product, an analysis of representation in IR must take account of how those representations are produced, their context, the authority and legitimacy of the speaker, and the shaping of the audience, in order to determine the meanings that are evoked. This introduces the role of the media as an institution in creating representations and meaning. I will assert that the media as a social institution is central to the (re)creation of the nation-state as a universally valid form of political community. The production of media messages does much to suggest political values of the nation-state as a spatially bound natural entity. This extends from the role of the news media as explicitly oriented to national societies to the cultures of

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Walzer, ‘Membership’, in Andrew Linklater (ed) *Critical Concepts in Political Science: Volume 5*, (London: Routledge, 2000): pp. 1853-1859.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Risse, “Let’s Argue!”: Communicative Action in World Politics’, *International Organization* 54 (2000): 28-29; Martin Shaw, *Civil Society and Media in Global Crises: Representing Distant Violence*, (London: Pinter, 1996): p. 181.

production within the media that encourage both conservatism and the prominence of the state in news media discourse.

The second section of this work will draw out these aspects through a consideration of the American news print media's representation of the United States intervention into Somalia during Operation Restore Hope, from December 1992 to May 1993. An analysis of intervention has been chosen as an instance when the state is laid bare, when the values of sovereignty, non-intervention and statehood are most open to discussion, and thus to how these are given value in moral terms. The discussion of the intervention in Somalia is a fruitful place to consider these productive practices because it presents a novel case that the U.S. media is attempting to explain. Somalia is the first instance of an American humanitarian intervention, the template in which subsequent crises would be considered, and thereby presents an attempt by the news media to reconcile the values of international society, non-intervention, with values of universal rights in explaining the crisis. The case study will outline how the media presents the crisis in Somalia as an event rather than a process. The causal narrative conveyed in this instance reinscribes the universality of the state, emphasizing individualistic character flaws over structural explanations of the crisis.

The final section will examine how the idea of the state expressed by the American news media's representations relates to dominant approaches to state theory. I will argue that the meaning given to the state by these representations is not that of liberal social contract theory, which posits the state as the product of the consent of a collective of individuals. While the liberal idea of the state, discussed here through the work of Hobbes and Locke, is evident to a degree in American media representations, such as the assertion of universal human rights, it is not dominant in this discourse. Rather the state is conveyed as Hegelian, an ethical community that possess value in itself. As such, the media performs a ritualistic function by reinscribing the state as a universally valid form of political community and reinforcing the norms of the society of states. This presents substantial difficulties for critical approaches to IR that look to discourse in the public sphere as a site for the change of exclusionary political practices.<sup>10</sup> Structures of

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<sup>10</sup>Andrew Linklater, 'Dialogic politics and the civilizing process', *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005): pp. 145-147. Risse, 'Let's Argue!', *passim*.

economic and symbolic capital must be jointly altered if these dominant media representations are to be displaced.

## 2

### **Media Representations and the Social Construction of the State**

Media representations are comprised of practice and content. Current approaches to representation in IR are unable to integrate media representation into their work, as they focus on the meaning of language divorced from its social and historical context as a social commodity. It is necessary to consider the actual social production of statist discourses in order to understand the representation of the state in its totality. This extends from the cultural environment of the journalistic field – with its orientation to the market and its specific institutional codes – to the role of the media as a social institution that helps construct spatially and temporally bounded political communities defined through the exclusion of outsiders.

#### *Representation, Simulation and Production*

A significant body of literature in IR has developed that focuses on representation – the ‘production of the meaning of concepts in our minds through language’.<sup>11</sup> These works are centrally concerned with the manner in which regimes of truth and knowledge are created and circulated, and the implications of these regimes on global politics.<sup>12</sup> These studies represent an important development in IR. They effectively undermine claims of positivist accounts of objectivity by underlining the inherently political nature of how we speak about the world, quite effectively linking this into the actual conduct of politics. However, as noted, these approaches tend to focus almost exclusively on elitist discourses of international politics, confined primarily to foreign policy practices or academic discourses, neglecting construction of international norms and values in everyday situations. This fails to situate representation and meaning within a framework

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘The Work of Representation’ in Stuart Hall (ed) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1997): p. 17. See David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) and the works mentioned by Doty and Walker for important examples.

<sup>12</sup> Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, pp. 2-3.



of social production that occurs in a lifeworld setting.<sup>13</sup> These approaches treat the meaning of language as inherent in the language itself, neglecting the importance of the speaker and the context. Not only are material object and subjects constituted by representations, but representations are constituted through material structures as well.<sup>14</sup> A discussion of Cynthia Weber's *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* is helpful in illustrating these issues.<sup>15</sup>

Weber's work is important as one of the few investigations into the role of discourses of intervention in constituting the state as universally valid. She focuses on the question. 'How does the representation assumption affect our understandings of state sovereignty and intervention?'<sup>16</sup> Weber asserts that a logic of representation maintains an idea of truth at its core, attempts to fix meanings in a permanent relationship outside of history, to stabilize a sovereign foundation at the heart of discourse that is neither desirable nor sustainable.<sup>17</sup> Instead, she looks to a Baudriallardian informed logic of simulation in which simulacrum, 'the truth effect that hides truth's non-existence', is the manner in which the state is written.<sup>18</sup> Signs are no longer 'meaningful' as they refer only back to other signs in a chain of signifiers with no grounding in 'reality' or 'truth'; in terms of the discourse of sovereignty and intervention, "these are interchangeable terms which respect no boundary, a boundary between them must be simulated in order to simulate the state".<sup>19</sup> Weber's work is an attempt to expose the arbitrariness of the centre, an ultimate deconstruction of the signifying chain.<sup>20</sup> However, this attempt suffers from substantial defects that undermines the usefulness of Weber's work, and calls into question attempts to treat the text divorced from social production.

Despite strenuous protests, Weber relies on a 'truth' against which the American interventions into Panama and Grenada can be judged in order to assert that these events are not really interventions, but simulations of the state and sovereignty; this suggests the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 6-7. Hartley, *Understanding*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. xxi.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 35-36.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp. 126-128.

<sup>20</sup> Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, pp. 6-7.

presence of some external criteria by which Weber can judge American conduct, particularly evident in her discussion of the simulation of the Endara government.<sup>21</sup> Weber thereby undermines her own ontological position and weakens the argument for a logic of simulation. She fails to inquire into the role of social power in creating authority and legitimacy, and at the very least acquiescence, for the American representations of the interventions of Panama and Grenada. One could not, for instance, imagine a successful simulation of this type by the Panamanian government regarding an alternative disenfranchised American administration. Such an attempt would simply not have been accepted as ‘meaningful’, as an indication of the illegitimacy of the American government. Meaning cannot be ‘endlessly exchanged’ if it is dependent on the factors of its social production.<sup>22</sup>

Weber fails to recognize the construction of representation and meaning as an intersubjective process linking issues of social power, authority and legitimacy which are central to the creation and acceptance of shared meaning.<sup>23</sup> ‘Sovereigntyintervention’ cannot be considered as one term, universally sharing a symbolic exchange value, as the value of the exchange varies according to the speaker.<sup>24</sup> By attempting to maintain the existence of an endless chain of signifiers, Weber’s work actually posits the universal validity of a highly contingent and contextual process of producing meaning. It reinforces the authority of an official language as the valid standard by which meaning is conveyed, neglecting the role of historical construction of official language as itself a site of domination.<sup>25</sup> Whether a state is sovereign or not, whether America has intervened or not, is not only dependent on the attachment of the word ‘American’ to troops crossing in a geographical space; it is dependent on who has attached those words, the social position of the spokesperson. Attached by the New York Times, for example, and this information/representation takes on an air of legitimacy and authority, it is accepted as factual, which is not the case necessarily for private individuals. As Pierre Bourdieu

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<sup>21</sup> Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty*, pp.118-120.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991): p. 170; Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995): pp. 71-73.

<sup>24</sup> Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty*, pp. 126-128.

<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, passim.

notes, 'It is only in exceptional circumstances that ...symbolic exchanges are reduced to relations of pure communication'.<sup>26</sup>

Recognizing the importance of the social production of representations is vital to an analysis of the news media's construction of political values in an everyday context. Media representations are given greater weight and legitimacy through the symbolic authority with which the media is invested. Current structures of economic capital concentrate media ownership in the hands of a limited number of corporations, and thereby grant great symbolic capital to the representations produced by groups satisfied with the status quo. The news media is typically viewed as a social institution that is geared towards the truthful representation of the world.<sup>27</sup> The meaning attached to a newspapers representation of intervention, for example, is granted significance and legitimacy through the authority that is invested in the paper as an institution. It is vital to recognize that the news media's representations have a particular meaning within the context of the media's status as a legitimate body authorized to present a picture of the world to society. Media representations cannot be divorced from this context; media texts cannot be viewed outside of their social production, for this social production not only determines how events and situations are presented, but also how that presentation is received and made sense of by the audience. Meaning is thus more variable, and more constrained, than Weber allows.

### *Cultures of Production and the Construction of the Nation-State*

The production of news discourse serves to reconstitute and naturalize the state in two respects. First the culture of news production with its market orientation encourages conservative, predictable and disposable approach to events. This undermines the potential for the production of critical in-depth analyses of structural causation in news stories and promotes a dissemination of accepted political norms. Second, the media

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>27</sup> Jackie Harrison, *News*, (London: Routledge, 2006): pp. 1-6.

construction of an imagined audience is key to the (re)creation of imagined communities. Each aspect will now be considered in turn.

As noted earlier, the news media functions as an authoritative and central source in building our pictures of the world and structuring debate in the public sphere. News journalists present an ideal of objectivity and neutrality as the cornerstones of professional practice. Journalists attempt to separate fact from value, straight news from opinion, reality from rhetoric, and ‘newsmakers’ from news reporters.<sup>28</sup> The professional culture of news journalism actively presents itself as little more than a mirror on society, suggesting a correspondence theory of truth that powerfully constructs media representations as accurate and value free. In the process, it discloses a naturalist epistemology of the social world that conceals the hand of production processes in creating the news. This position orients the journalist towards a tacit acceptance of the status quo as the role of media representations in the social construction of reality is rejected. Liberal pluralist theories of the media are led to assert that the news media occupies a vital space in democratic societies as a ‘Fourth Estate’, a check on abuses of power by elites in society.<sup>29</sup> Advocates of this position argue that the news media interrogates the practices of the state and misdeeds of the powerful and “has been a force not only for ideological control but also and increasingly for democratization, facilitating and encouraging the mergence of genuine mass political participation.”<sup>30</sup> However, debates within the news media take place within a very limited spectrum. They focus upon individual issues or events, rather than historical structures or processes. The cultural stock of knowledge that forms the background of our lifeworlds remains unquestioned.

Liberal pluralist perspectives overlook the news media as a cultural industry creating goods for consumers in a marketplace. Despite the claims to objectivity and neutrality on the part of news professionals, the news media is permanently subject to

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<sup>28</sup> Theodore L. Glaser and Stephanie Craft, ‘Public journalism and the search for democratic ideals’ in Tamar Liebes and James Curran (eds) *Media, Ritual and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998): p. 204. Jackie Harrison, *News* (London: Routledge, 2006): p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Brian McNair, *The Sociology of Journalism*, (London, Hodder, 1998): p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 29. For an excellent account of the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches in media theory, see Paul Manning *News and News Sources: A Critical Introduction*, (London: Sage Publications, 2001): chapter 2.

trial by market, with a substantial influence on journalistic practice and output.<sup>31</sup> The impact of the location of the journalistic field within the marketplace extends well beyond the traditionalists lament of ‘dumbing down’ in the news – of populism- to the very means in which news narratives, high or low brow, are produced as consumer goods. Success in the field is judged by ratings and sales. Contrary to the liberal pluralist position, this actively encourages a convergence of news practices and discourses, limiting the political perspectives represented.<sup>32</sup> As Bourdieu has noted, there is a drive among journalists and newspapers to gain a competitive edge over rivals by searching for the scoop, the newest news, leading to a strong drive for speed and a permanent refreshing of stories. Bourdieu writes: “This pace favours a sort of permanent amnesia, the negative obverse of the new, as well as a propensity to judge producers and products according to the opposition between ‘new’ or ‘out-of-date’”.<sup>33</sup> The drive for novelty this leads to a sacrifice of in-depth coverage in favour of stories that can be produced quickly and efficiently. ‘Events’ are prioritized over narratives tracing gradually unfolding stories for their impact and sensationalism, creating a truncated understanding of social relationships that naturalizes political structures.<sup>34</sup> The construction of news narratives is a function of the interrelation between symbolic capital and economic capital. It is evident that, while rejecting a propaganda model of media theory, the role of money and structural power cannot be overlooked in examining discourse in the public sphere.

Far from encouraging innovation, journalistic culture generates highly ritualized and highly conservative means of producing the news. Journalists, in order to meet deadlines, have developed a work culture that builds in a level of control into the production of the news, allowing copy to be produced quickly in response to events.<sup>35</sup> Highly developed routines emerge that channel the story and source selection of the news in the direction of the familiar and the accessible. Restraints of time and resources thereby work to undercut in-depth narratives, substituting shallow narratives that emphasize drama and which are quick and cheap to produce. There is simply no

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<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu, *On Television*, p. 71; Hartley, *Understanding*, p. 48.

<sup>32</sup> Manning, *News*, chapter 2.

<sup>33</sup> Bourdieu, *On television*, p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> Manning, *News*, p. 61; See also Chin-Chaun Lee, et al., ‘National Prisms of a Global “Media Event”’ in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds) *Mass Media and Society* (London: Hodder, 2000): pp. 295-309.

<sup>35</sup> Manning, *News*, p. 55.

encouragement towards complex and nuanced storytelling within a market oriented and pressurized journalistic environment, so that news production values emphasize events over processes.<sup>36</sup> The drive for novelty thus paradoxically rests alongside a strong conservatism in journalistic production which favours established norms.

The journalist relies on networks of sources as primary source of this stability, first and foremost among these being the state and government institutions “which can provide the kind of information that can easily be fashioned into news copy”.<sup>37</sup> Not only does this serve to favour an elite or privileged political position in the production of news; it is also important in casting the state and state representatives as authoritative voices in society, and filters our impressions of events through this lens. The symbolic capital possessed by the state is enhanced by its place within news journalism discourses. This situation is particularly marked in the telling of international news stories, as the media relies on political authorities to set the agenda on which stories are of national interest.<sup>38</sup> Taking their cues from national governments, and under pressure to meet deadlines, journalists are discouraged from producing copy critical of the state. Individual journalists’ career progression rests on following the established institutional practices. This has the effect of producing similar stories from similar sources and told in familiar ways. The culture of production in the newsroom thereby constitutes a significant constraint on our view of political events and possibilities. Structural explanations for crises – such as the state failure in Somalia discussed below – are sidelined in favour of individualistic narratives.

The manner in which the news media assumes a ‘national’ audience and framework further solidifies the effects of journalistic practice. Differences between editorial stances across the ideological divide are far more substantial between countries than within them.<sup>39</sup> For all the differentiations of newspapers in terms of editorial stances, their target audiences, their different styles, they all assume a shared ‘national’ community as their audience/consumers. This situation is demonstrated in the manner in which journalistic markets adhere to state and national boundaries; for example,

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<sup>36</sup> Hartley, *Understanding*, pp. 76-79.

<sup>37</sup> Manning, *News*, p.55. Harrison, *News*, pp. 32, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Lee et al., ‘National Prisms’, p. 296.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

newspapers are either Canadian or American, never addressing both audiences simultaneously as a North American newspaper.<sup>40</sup> It is also reflected in the separation of news into separate categories within newspapers, into ‘national/domestic’ and ‘international/foreign’ news, or in the attempts to find domestic angles in international news stories. Jeffrey Alexander and Ronald Jacobs outline this situation:

The point is that media texts provide a certain flow of cultural material from producers to audiences, who in turn use them in their lifeworld settings to construct a meaningful world and to maintain a common cultural framework through which intersubjectivity becomes possible, even among those who may never come into contact with each other... In other words, the media allows for the transformation of a limitless and unbounded space into a symbolically fixed place, a process necessary to the durability of civil society<sup>41</sup>

This is not to suggest that the audience accepts this process unconsciously. The meaning produced by media texts must always be recognized as a negotiated one, variable according to the interaction between the text, its social production, and its interpretation by the audience. However, the institutional form of the media is strongly implicated in the construction of the nation-state. This extends from the practice of consumption to the language which newspapers utilize to address their audience.

Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, has argued that the newspaper functions as an extraordinary mass ceremony, the simultaneous consumption of the paper vital to the ‘imagining’ of the audience as an assumed totality: people become aware of the millions of people who belong to this shared audience and the millions who do not.<sup>42</sup> He outlines print capitalism as a central pillar in the growth of nationalism since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, part of the ‘embryo of the nationally imagined

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<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the strong links between media and the nation-state is reflected by the perpetual drive by the Canadian government to protect its indigenous media markets from American competitors, an attempt to preserve ‘national’ culture.

<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander and Ronald N. Jacobs, ‘Mass communication, ritual and civil society’ in Tamar Liebes and James Curran (eds) *Media, Ritual and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998): p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983): pp. 35, 44.

community’.<sup>43</sup> Newspapers are a driving force behind the linguistic unification of communities by helping to establish an official and authoritative version of a language with which all members of the audience may understand each other. This has the effect of binding together members of a language family as a territorially unified body. Bourdieu notes that “The normalized language is capable of functioning outside of the constraints and without the assistance of the situation, as is suitable for transmitting and decoding by any sender and receiver, who may know nothing of one another.”<sup>44</sup> The language of newspapers presents an official version of language that works to make dialects and variations appear as diversions from the legitimate, as anomalies. It suggests an ideal type, a unified language reflective of the unified nation to which speakers may aspire, projecting not only a nation into the past from which this ideal language is derived, but the nation into the future as embodied in the quest for linguistic perfection on the part of individual speakers.<sup>45</sup> Newspapers must speak in a language that is meaningful to the entire community, favouring a conservative use of language that restricts innovations in usage and meaning. Newspapers symbolic authority is subsequently reinforced in the construction of the nation and in the constitution and maintenance of legitimate language and the legitimate norms and values that this language has come to represent. The news media are part of a feedback mechanism in which their authority and the authority of the nation-state are intimately linked.

The newspaper as a social institution combines with the work culture of journalism, and the individual career paths of journalists, to reinforce the legitimacy of the territorially bound nation-state. In its market orientation, news values and production processes the news print media favours shallow individualistic narratives over complex social and historical structural analyses. The symbolic capital that accrues to economic capital is thereby left unquestioned. It contains ‘an unarticulated commitment to the established order’.<sup>46</sup> This has the effect of naturalizing the political relationships within

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.44. Again, anecdotal evidence indicates the strength of this process, as in the use of Canadian spellings versus American spellings in their newspapers, ‘favour’ versus ‘favor’ a marker of difference to those within each respective community.

<sup>44</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p.48.

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, *Imagined*, p.44; Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 58.

<sup>46</sup> Lee, ‘National Prisms’, p. 296.



and, crucially, between societies in our everyday lives. This situation extends beyond the practice of the media to the approaches of scholars studying it. While media theorists outline their concerns for the vitality of the public sphere, or raise calls for ‘public journalism’ to reinvigorate democratic ideals, or detail the marginalization of minority groups the media effects, their work often assumes society as a spatially bounded entity.<sup>47</sup> Media scholarship thereby unconsciously assumes the division of international society as a society of states and aides in its reproduction.

An approach to the narratives of the news print media in international relations that is informed by critical theory must place reflexivity and praxis at its core to understand the practical political implications of academic theorizing.<sup>48</sup> This necessitates opening up the study of news media beyond a national perspective. One route suggested by James Curran would be to examine how the national journalistic fields interact on an international level – that is, the interaction between national public spheres and how this (potentially) forms an international public sphere.<sup>49</sup> Crucially, though, this suggestion fails to consider how the idea of nationality and internationality is constructed in the first place. This work thus suggests that a critical IR theory approach to the media in international relations must examine how the narratives of the news print media are situated, produced, and construct a conception of international society in the ‘world within our reach’, and the political outcomes of this process. As Jurgen Habermas argues in outlining a critically reflexive approach to the constitution of the life world: ‘As long as we do not force ourselves from the naïve, situation oriented practice of everyday life, we cannot grasp the limitations of a lifeworld that is dependent upon, and changes along with, a cultural stock of knowledge that can be expanded at any time’.<sup>50</sup> Having outlined, however briefly, the productive and institutional role of the media in constructing the cultural stock of knowledge about world politics that forms our lifeworld, it is now vital to examine a concrete example of this process, to which we now turn.

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<sup>47</sup> Alexander and Jacobs, ‘Mass Communication’, passim; Glasser and Craft, ‘Public journalism’, passim; Hartely, *Understanding*, passim.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Neufeld, *The Restructuring of International Relations Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): chapter 3.

<sup>49</sup> James Curran, ‘Rethinking Media and Democracy’ in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds) *Mass Media and Society* (London: Hodder, 2000): pp.136-137.

<sup>50</sup> Habermas, *Theory*, p. 133.

### 3

#### **Causality, News Discourse and the State**

Narrative forms a central aspect of our daily lives. It describes and defines the domain of mutual understanding between individuals and collectivities, creating and coalescing in a set of background assumptions that make these narratives intelligible.<sup>51</sup> In examining the media representations of the American intervention in Somalia from December 1992 to May 1993, Operation Restore Hope, this case study will outline the role that media narratives play in constructing an intelligible story of the crisis. The news discourse of humanitarian intervention has been chosen because it exposes what borders mean in political and ethical terms, and the value expressed by intervention. As Cornelia Navarri states: 'At the heart of our thinking about intervention, therefore, is the problem of the state: What is a state and what is a state for?'<sup>52</sup> An analysis of intervention provides a direct means of accessing how norms of political community and moral obligation are presented.

The causal narrative that the news media's representation conveys is the focus of this analysis. Causality is of central importance in explaining a story. Causal narratives project a framework of mutual intelligibility, that is, a comprehensible set of events or circumstances that may have led to the failure of the Somali state, and thereby reveal the larger discursive background upon which this explanation relies.<sup>53</sup> Further, the ultimate stress that causality places on certain factors, which it must inevitably do in explaining an event, reveals the political decisions that enter into narrative storytelling. As Suganami has outlined, causal narratives are constituted by four categories: the discursive

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<sup>51</sup> Habermas, *Theory*, p.136. Hidemi Suganami, *On The Causes of War*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): p. 204.

<sup>52</sup> Cornelia Navari, 'Intervention, Non-Intervention and the Construction of the State', in Ian Forbes and Mark Hoffman (eds) *Political Theory, International Relations and the Ethics of Intervention* (London: MacMillan Press, 1993): p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> Milja Kurki, 'Causes of a Divided Discipline: rethinking the concept of cause in International Relations Theory', *Review of International Studies* 32 (2006): passim. Suganami, *On the Causes of War*, p. 208.

background, chance coincidences, mechanisms and human activity.<sup>54</sup> The choice - of what may be alternatively labeled cultural knowledge, chance, structure, and agency-between emphasizing one of these factors in a causal narrative is not given to the events themselves. Rather it is given to narrative by the storyteller, an explicitly political decision open to critical interrogation in a manner not suggested by the news media's naturalist ontology.

The case study sources are the mainstream American print media, such as the New York Times and Time Magazine, chosen for their prominence in constructing debate in the American public sphere.<sup>55</sup> There are limitations resulting from this choice such as the similar target audience for such media outlets (mainly middle class) and the neglect of alternative discourses in the print media. However, given the focus of this paper upon the construction of media representations and the meaning of political community in a common framework of norms these high profile sources are ideal. They frequently set the tone for other media outlets, and their output is frequently included in the world news sections of the regional newspapers that comprise the American market. This case study will focus on two aspects of the causal explanation for the Somali crisis offered by the American news print media. It will look at what stories are told about the crisis, outlining whether the emphasis is upon chance, structure, or agency and it will discuss how the story is told, its constituent elements. This interrogation finds that the American news media's representation of the causes of the humanitarian crisis worked to reinscribe the state a universally appropriate form of political organization.<sup>56</sup> The meaning of the crisis is portrayed as an individualistic failure, rather than a structural one.

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<sup>54</sup> Suganami, *On The Causes of War*, p. 205.

<sup>55</sup> The limitations of this paper prevented an engagement with perhaps the most important news outlet in the United States, television. This is unfortunate, especially given its supposed role in goading the American government to action in Somalia, although the 'CNN effect' has been widely disputed. See Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The myth of news, foreign policy and intervention*, (London: Routledge, 2002): pp.46-63. On the other hand, television images derive their meaning from their place within a discursive framework, and thus the textual representations considered in this case are intimately linked to the interpretations of pictorial representations. See David Campbell, 'Cultural governance', pp.72-73, for a discussion of the potential to overestimate the importance of the pictorial turn in social theory.

<sup>56</sup> The question of the appropriateness of the European nation-state as valid for all societies and cultures is increasingly questioned. See Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (Oxford: James Currey, 1992). These concerns are shared by many scholars on Somalia, the focus of the case study in this work. See for example the contributions by Ali A. Mazuri and Charles Gesheker in *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford (eds) (Lawrenceville N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1997).

Cultural and character flaws are emphasized in a shallow description of the American intervention, at the expense of detail of the event as a process of interacting social, political and historical factors. Further, the manner in which the story is told works to reconstitute the imaging of the United States as a nation. The institutional elements of the media, from its reliance on government sources, its domestication of foreign news stories, and its construction of dichotomies relying on an assumed audience, are all key to this process. This analysis will work to draw out these aspects of the narrative and their implications for the role of the media in constructing a picture of political community.

### *Irrationalism and Violence in Somali Society*

The causal explanation constructed in the news print media's representation of Operation Restore Hope reflects a quite simplistic, and quite prevalent, version of a covering law model of causation. The covering law model, outlined by Carl Hempel, relies on regularity and generalizability to explain single causal events in terms of generalized causal laws.<sup>57</sup> Events are groups according to categories, so that the singular causal event (a) is an example of generalized causal event (A), and singular effect event (b) is an example of generalized effect event (B).<sup>58</sup> Thus the generalized causal law explains the singular causal event. In the representation of the crisis in Somalia, Somalia is grouped together as a case with crises in Bosnia, Liberia, Cambodia and the Sudan.<sup>59</sup> A very diverse set of events are thereby bracketed under a single criteria - that of state failure - and a single generalized cause is deemed responsible. An opinion piece by Joseph Nye is indicative of the tone set by these articles. Nye portrays these conflicts as a distinct phenomenon juxtaposed against the 'traditional balance of power'.<sup>60</sup> He writes of the 'new tribalism' that drives these situations, asserting that 'Ethnic conflicts once suppressed during the Cold War are creating a type of war for which we are poorly

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<sup>57</sup> Suganami, *On the Causes of War*, pp. 116-119. Suganami offers an excellent and accessible account of causality for the uninitiated.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, pp. 118-119.

<sup>59</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 1<sup>st</sup> 1992, World Report, page 1. *The New York Times*, December 4<sup>th</sup> 1992, a30; December 5<sup>th</sup> 1992, a18; February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1993, a18; February 7<sup>th</sup> 1993, a1. *Time Magazine*, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1992, pp. 14-15. *Washington Post*, December 4<sup>th</sup>, a24.

<sup>60</sup> *Washington Post*, December 15<sup>th</sup>, a23.

prepared'.<sup>61</sup> Nye thus works to categorize these crises as events of a type, caused by what is alternately termed the 'new tribalism' or 'ethnic conflict'.

The claims of Nye's work are positively restrained compared to other examples. Robin Wright of the Los Angeles Times asserts that humanitarian intervention could be needed 'anyplace where there's intermingling of ethnic, religious and racial groups, or bloodshed, starvation, torture and so forth...Virtually any country with a large and cohesive minority, foreign policy analysts say, is also a candidate for outside involvement.'<sup>62</sup> Wright places ethnic or religious difference as the prime causal factor that would precipitate a crisis and require intervention to the omission of almost any other political or social aspects, casting a potentially massive scope for future interventions. Similarly, the New York Times' Thomas Friedman outlines the threat posed by these 'bizarre' tribal identifications, leaving the affected states 'to the tender mercies of their own histories... and in most cases it is not a pretty sight.'<sup>63</sup> Again, this outlines cultural flaws as the generalized cause of a generalized category of event, state failure. One can see here the effect of a journalistic culture that favours efficiency and simplicity over rigor and complexity in constructing its narratives. What, for instance, is the cause of the ethnic rivalry? What is it that these groups are fighting over? Nye, Friedman and Wright suggest a certain timelessness to these divisions, a natural condition for the populations in these crises zones. However, this conveys an extremely limited understanding of state failure in both the general and the specific, and discloses a concept of state failure as the result of human agency alone.

These constructed categories reverberate through the accounts of the Somali crises and the American intervention. The irrationality of Somalis is heavily emphasized as the cause of the humanitarian disaster there. The picture presented of Somalia is of a 'war-torn Horn of Africa country', the 'daily violence of Somali life', 'banditry and random violence', of a 'people with nothing to lose, and that makes them very dangerous.'<sup>64</sup> This depiction is not isolated. Various papers speak of 'the plundering by Somali bandits', 'a violent urban population that basically thrives off street crime and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 27<sup>th</sup>, a21.

<sup>63</sup> *New York Times*, December 13<sup>th</sup>, World Section, pp. 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, December 1<sup>st</sup>, World Report, pp. 1.

intimidation', 'Somalian gangs and swaggering street thugs', 'the thousands of ragtag fighters who are terrorizing the country', or of 'the gauntlet of armed gangs roving the city (Mogadishu)'.<sup>65</sup> Somalis are cast both as desperate and as irrational, for whom 'fighting means looting' and drugs are rampant among the young; these depictions are related to the most relevant post-apocalyptic picture for the audience: 'A heavily armed "Mad Max" style vehicle known as a technical tried to ram through the gates of the relief agency CARE and turned around only when the guard threatened the driver with a hand grenade'.<sup>66</sup> The message is fairly clear. Somalia represents a complete breakdown of order and normal politics; it people are violent and irrational, killing each other out of some deep seated blood lust. No political motive is offered for the violence, again suggesting a permanent condition of the Somali character that a Western audience could not understand. The only recourse is to the realm of fiction, to the narrative of the apocalypse presented by Hollywood, in order to convey the meaning of the situation there.

Even articles that acknowledge that the crisis has a number of causal factors lay the ultimate cause in human nature. Thus a Washington Post article, shortly after outlining the role of the United States and the Soviet Union in arming Somali dictator Siad Barre and the impact this had on the states' failure, outlines how, 'Ultimately, however, Somalis themselves are responsible': 'Asked to explain the violence, Hussein said, "We have tribal feeling: Every tribe wants to kill the other..."'<sup>67</sup> This causal explanation effectively discounts the earlier discussion of the historical aspects of the crisis. Identifying the 'ultimate' cause of the violence is of course the same as locating *the* cause of the violence, rendering the previous contextualization irrelevant.<sup>68</sup> The irrationality of Somalis is portrayed as the instigator of the humanitarian crisis, maintaining the singular cause-effect relationship under the general laws outlined by Nye and company.

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<sup>65</sup> *USA Today*, December 4<sup>th</sup>, front page & 2a; *Time Magazine*, 'Taking on The Thugs', December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1992; *New York Times*, December 5<sup>th</sup>, a18.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Times*, December 7<sup>th</sup>, a12; *New York Times*, December 8<sup>th</sup>, front page. *New York Times* March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1993, a4, also contains these intertextual references to Hollywood films 'Checkpoint 77' and 'Fort Apache', underlining the 'unreality' of the crisis for an American audience.

<sup>67</sup> *Washington Post*, December 27<sup>th</sup>, a1. See also *New York Times*, February 6<sup>th</sup>, a21.

<sup>68</sup> Suganami, *On The Causes of War*, pp. 204-206.

Social and historical factors are relegated to a cursory role at best in the media's representations. It is interesting to note that the media representations of the crisis in Somalia quite often create an impression of a decisive breakdown in Somali society following dictator Siad Barre's fall from power in January 1991. The New York Times Magazine writes that 'The famine that has claimed more than 100, 000 lives since March is no natural calamity but an outgrowth of the anarchy that engulfed Somalia after President Mohammed Siad Barre lost power in January 1991.'<sup>69</sup> While this piece identifies the Somali crisis as the product of political relationships, it does not identify exactly what the factors involved in the crisis were. The same is true of numerous accounts that do characterize Barre as a dictator or as authoritarian, but nevertheless contrast the period of his rule as one of order and the current situation as one of anarchy.<sup>70</sup> In a particularly egregious example, the Times focuses on a Somali traffic officer who mourns the order of the Barre regime: 'Tears welled in Mr. Hassan's eyes when he recounted what he once had', contrasting the crisis of the present to a highly idealized picture of a just and orderly past.<sup>71</sup> This narrative neglects the role of structural factors, of history, in prompting the fall of Barre. It suggests that pre-January 1991 was a period of order and stability in which 'ethnic hatreds' were suppressed, while post-1991 these have been unleashed, causing chaos. One would be hard pressed to describe the period from 1969 to 1991 as orderly in any meaningful sense of the term. Barre's regime was a personal dictatorship that terrorized Somalia for decades, waging internal cleansing campaigns against perceived threats to the state, shelling and bombing northern Somali towns throughout the late 1980s, and is seen by most academics as directly responsible for the upheaval in Somalia.<sup>72</sup> Order was enforced through state violence that claimed as many as 60 000 lives from 1988 to 1990 alone and was central to the creation of Somalia's militias.<sup>73</sup> The impression that the crisis began with Barre's fall from power

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<sup>69</sup> *New York Times Magazine*, December 6<sup>th</sup>, pp. 14.

<sup>70</sup> *Washington Post*, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1993, a18.

<sup>71</sup> *New York Times*, December 15<sup>th</sup>, a9.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Gesheker, 'The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective', in Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford (eds) *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1997): passim. Terrence Lyons and Ahmed Samatar, *Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention and Strategies for Political Reconstruction* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995): pp. 14-21.

<sup>73</sup> Gesheker, 'The Death of Somalia', pp. 76-79.

rather than a long time prior to that single event is produced by the limitations of the news media's ability to contextualize its stories.<sup>74</sup>

### *Domestication and the Imagination of America*

The character flaws of Somalis are reinforced through their comparison with the benevolence and generosity of the American troops, creating a set of binary oppositions between them which underscores an individualistic causal narrative in explaining Somalia's crisis. The American intervention is cast in an overwhelmingly positive light, and again as the product of character. The official designation of the intervention, Operation Restore Hope, is echoed in the news media's portrayal of the role of the American military. It is identified in the headlines as a 'Mission of mercy' in which 'American Troops Bear Gifts on A Human Scale'.<sup>75</sup> This is not an isolated example of U.S. charity, but fundamental to American identity. Thus Jeffrey Clarke outlines the relief effort as an outpouring of American values of freedom and the rule of law. Clarke writes: "And who gains more than the United States by having American ideals of basic human rights and respect for the rule of law globally enshrined?... Our relative affluence and our moral position enable us to do more than any other government to force these issues to the top of the international agenda."<sup>76</sup> Time Magazine portrays this as America's historic burden: 'Once again thousands of American soldiers are donning flak jackets and moving into harms way on a far-off continent'.<sup>77</sup>

The altruism of America actions is emphasized. It is projected as an entirely impartial force looking to save as many lives as possible. This discloses a vision of America as rational. The United States is able to act as an arbiter because it can distinguish between competing claims from Somali clans; it possesses the knowledge and wisdom to do so. American news media representations are keen to note that 'Many Somalis have insisted that U.S. troops must remain here for several months, declaring

<sup>74</sup> For similar examples identifying this as a key date, see *Chicago Tribune*, December 7<sup>th</sup>, Perspective Section, pp. 19; *USA Today*, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2a; *New York Times*, December 7<sup>th</sup>, a12; *Time Magazine*, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1994, pp. 46-47.

<sup>75</sup> *New York Times*, December 13<sup>th</sup>, Week in Review, front page; *USA Today*, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, front page; *New York Times*, December 25<sup>th</sup>, a5. *Washington Post*, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1993, front page.

<sup>76</sup> *Washington Post*, December 6<sup>th</sup>, Outlook Section, pg.3.

<sup>77</sup> *Time Magazine*, December 14<sup>th</sup>, pp. 14-15.



that only Washington has the clout and public trust to mediate among the country's warring factions.<sup>78</sup> If the irrationality of the Somalis, their 'ancient hatreds', are the cause of state failure, these representations suggest that the rationality of Americans, a feature of their 'values' and 'moral position' intrinsic to their character, is the solution. Just as the need for quickly produced copy prevents an in-depth exploration of the causes of state failure in the news media's narrative, it also works to reinforce reliance on lazy stereotypes. Working in tandem with the need to domesticate foreign news stories for audience consumption, the representations of the differences between the United States and Somalia drives the active imagining of a coherent American identity. Americans are constructed as sharing certain cultural characteristics special to themselves which make them American. One can see here the role of the imagining of community performed by the news media as outlined by Anderson. The differences between themselves and the Somali people are not differences of chance or structures, but intrinsic to their being.

The debate over the validity of the American intervention takes place on similarly shallow ground. The foundational norms of international society, sovereignty and non-intervention, function as the presuppositions of these debates, unquestioned and sidelined by the casual narrative outlined above, and impart these norms as an assumed consensus for the audience.<sup>79</sup> The background of the causal narrative tightly constrains the debate over intervention. Thus, while claims that 'if national sovereignty means the power to deny starving citizens access to food and relief supplies, the United Nations should be proud to override it', disclose a liberal cosmopolitan conception of human rights, they also disclose the normative value attached to sovereignty that the U.N. may override only in exceptional circumstances.<sup>80</sup> Were the liberal cosmopolitan values dominant in our picture of world politics, such a justification would be extraneous.<sup>81</sup> The right and moral duty to aid 'strangers' would be assumed, and the action in Somalia would not really require the label of intervention.

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<sup>78</sup> *Washington Post*, January 4<sup>th</sup>, front page. *New York Times*, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1993, a5.

<sup>79</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Hodder Headline, 1995): p. 107.

<sup>80</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1992, Perspective Section, pp. 19,. See also *New York Times*, December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1992, a14; May 2nd, 1993, Week in Review, pp. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Mervyn Frost notes that norms may be viewed as in force according to the justification required for deviance from them. See Mervyn Frost, *Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): p. 105.

However, this is not the case. The dominant norms of state sovereignty and non-intervention are evident in the calls for the restoration of sovereignty to Somalia as the goal of intervention.<sup>82</sup> The expression of basic universal human rights does not result in an in-depth interrogation of the norms of international society. There is little question that the role of the United States and the United Nations is short term, aimed at stabilizing Somalia in order to affect the ‘reconstruction’ of the state.<sup>83</sup> The Somali state is projected as existing, in some sense, in perpetuity even though its government has collapsed. Hawkish liberal opinion in the U.S. media does not question the form of the state as a valid manner of political organization; they only question the conduct of particular national governments ability to meet their criteria of liberal human rights.<sup>84</sup> The media discourse exhibits some tension between universal liberal human rights values and the values of freedom and autonomy expressed by norms of sovereignty and non-intervention.<sup>85</sup> With the assistance of the United States and United Nations they may stand on their own two feet within a state of their own, but seemingly it must be a liberal state. The fundamental difference between Americans and Somalis thereby remains intact. In being geared towards a national audience, the media’s representations work to universalize particularistic American values. The resulting depiction of international society for an American audience is constructed and evaluated on American terms. Debate does take place within the news media’s representations, but it is limited according to the shared presumptions of an American audience.

The act of causal weighting given in a news account is powerful because this process is masked with a sheen of objectivity and authority to a process that is subjective and value laden. Others aspects could easily have been identified as the generalized causal factor between Somalia and the other cases mentioned, such as a shared history of colonialism or the militarization of third world conflicts by the superpowers. The

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<sup>82</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1992, Perspective Section, pp. 19. See also *New York Times*, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1993, Week in Review, pp. 1; *Time Magazine*, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1992.

<sup>83</sup> *New York Times*, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1993, a24; May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993, a5.

<sup>84</sup> Liberal interventionism did develop in this direction during the 1990s in calls for the return of international trusteeship. See David Rieff, ‘A New Age of Liberal Imperialism?’, *World Policy Journal* 16 (Summer 1999). For a forceful rebuttal of this strand of liberal thought, see William Bain, *Between Anarchy and Society: Trusteeship and the Limits of Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>85</sup> Bain, *Between Anarchy*, pp. 165-168.

naturalistic ontology that pervades news media accounts suggests that these accounts are mirrors of reality. The inability to trace long term social relationships due to the restraints of time and money in news media production places the causal onus on human agency, and in turn maintains an unquestioned support of the status quo. The media domestication of the news story further entrenches this emphasis, inevitably stressing the negative aspects of those outside of the imagined audience of Americans. The implications of this representation are hardly neutral. By creating generalized categories of a cause and effect relationship between ethnic hatred and state failure, these representations encourage a generalized solution, 'nation building', the news media's suggested solution to the crisis. Opinion in the public sphere thereby becomes weighted towards the preservation of the international status quo.

## 4

### **Media Representations and the Idea of the State**

The American news media's representations serve to convey a distinctive idea of the state informing international norms and moral obligations. While the liberal social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke has been the dominant tradition justifying the creation of political authority and the state, the news media's representations considered holistically do not project this idea of the state.<sup>86</sup> The state is not, in the media's representation, a procedural body guaranteeing the provision of natural universal rights formed by individual contracts. Instead, the state is projected in a Hegelian sense as the ultimate expression of ethical community. Borders are constructed as ethically relevant, their 'reality' reflecting real moral differences between communities. International society as a society of states is subsequently affirmed as the ideal structure of human relations on a global scale. To illustrate these points I shall lay out the disjuncture between this idea of the state as outlined by Hobbes and Locke and the media's portrayal of the state. American news representations work to naturalize the state as the product of culture and tradition as opposed to individual rationality, and thus reinforce the dominance of exclusionary political organization in world politics.

#### *Social Contract Theory and Individual Rationality*

Hobbes' account of the state begins with outlining the condition of men in the state of nature, in which men exist in a condition of equality.<sup>87</sup> Rather than an idyllic condition, this equality of abilities ensures that no one can impose the rule of law upon the rest. There can be no law within the state of nature, then, as there can be no power above men by which to enforce it, so that men can only secure themselves and their

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<sup>86</sup> David R. Mapel, 'The Contractarian Tradition and International Ethics' in Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (eds) *Traditions of International Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): p.181.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962): p.95.

desires through a continual drive for power that sets them against other men.<sup>88</sup> Hobbes, in a classic and influential formulation, describes this anarchy as a condition of war ‘which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short.’<sup>89</sup> However, man is also possessed of the means by which to relieve this condition, the use of reason. Through reason men come to know the first law of nature, that everyman ought to seek peace as far as he may have hope of obtaining it, and the second law of nature, that men must be willing to lay down their right to self-defence when other men are also willing and be content with as much liberty for himself as he would allow others.<sup>90</sup> Men are thereby able to consent to transferring their natural right to a higher power, the sovereign, and create the Commonwealth in conjunction with other men collectively. This transference of rights to the sovereign permits the creation of law, as the sovereign possess the power, but also the authority and legitimacy, to rule over men in society. The law is binding upon all men equally as the social contract is not between individuals and the sovereign, but between the collective of individuals and the sovereign. Individuals thereby consent to the ultimate decision of the sovereign. Any attempt to break the contract on the part of an individual represents an unjust act. Hobbes’ state is not democratic. He felt that democracy would simply transfer the problem of conflicting interests from individuals to groups in a democratic state, and encourage the pursuit of power by interest groups.<sup>91</sup> Its primary purpose is to end the uncertainty of the state of nature.

The makeup of the state reflects Hobbes view of reason, and may be viewed as its concrete expression. Hobbes’ asserts that ‘Reason is conceiving of a sum total from an addition of parcels’, and similarly that the state is the sum total of man’s individual rights discovered through reason collectively conferred upon the sovereign.<sup>92</sup> The state is undoubtedly a community, but it is a community of individuals. Individuals are not

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, pp. 95-98.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.97.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.100. While Hobbes is often portrayed as the forerunner of rational choice theory with human interests based upon passion and material concerns rather than reason, this perspective misses the centrality of reason for the creation of the Leviathan. See David van Mill, *Rationality and Agency in Hobbes’s Leviathan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001): chapter 4, and Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): pp.26-27.

<sup>91</sup> van Mill, *Rationality*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>92</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 33.

bound by tradition, language, or culture, but by their reasoned decision to enter into a consensual agreement with each other to end the state of nature. Crucially, for Hobbes reason is a quality that individuals must exercise for themselves, as to believe in arguments based upon the authority of the speaker and of tradition is to believe as an object of faith, not of reason.<sup>93</sup> Ignorance disposes man to make custom and example the rule of his actions.<sup>94</sup> To base the authority of rule on custom would amount to the abrogation of reason on the part of individuals and would thereby invalidate the contract as a consensual agreement. The state is a just form of political order because it is the product of consent, and thus confirms man's autonomy and freedom. Custom, as the antithesis of reason, cannot be the basis of a just state.

Locke's account of the social contract also begins with an account of the state of nature, albeit one much different than Hobbes'. For Locke, the state of nature is a state of perfect freedom and equality in which men may act as they see fit.<sup>95</sup> It is governed by natural laws and rights which provide men with the means to live justly and which are universal in application. However, conflicts of interests and the inability to execute the law of nature leads men to form the Commonwealth, wherein the collective transference of natural rights ensures men may enforce and live according to the laws of nature.<sup>96</sup> Locke posits government as legitimate or illegitimate based upon their ability to govern according to the laws of nature. Government is not, then, as procedural as in Hobbes conception, its functions extending beyond the provision of order as it must fulfill the criteria of equality and freedom in order to maintain its legitimacy. A government that is unable to meet these criteria is subsequently not fit to possess authority over men; Locke's theory actively presents the right to rebellion, and the right to conquest, as the means by which unjust government may be overturned.

There are aspects of both Hobbes' and Locke's thought that resonate quite strongly with the American news media's representations of Somalia outlined above. Certainly in the representation of life in the absence of government, the media heavily relied on the idea of a Hobbesian state of nature by which the Somali crisis could be understood. The

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, pp.50-51.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p.79.

<sup>95</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1989): p.118.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, pp.180-181.

actions of Somalis were portrayed as anarchic and power-seeking in the absence of any legitimate authority such as a national police force that could provide order. The dichotomy between the irrationality of the state of nature and the rationality of the state is suggested through the juxtaposition of Americans and Somalis. The American government and soldiers are portrayed as reasonable and rational, and Somalis irrational, suggesting that only reasonable individuals devoid of ‘ancient hatreds’ and clannism are capable of constructing and maintaining orderly government. The causal account offered by the news media’s representations is important in portraying the state as a force for order and peace.

The assertion of universal human rights in the news media’s debates over the values of sovereignty and non-intervention indicate a Lockean theory of the state often forms the basis by which American media commentators differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate governments. Thus the assertion that sovereignty should be overridden is an assertion of a Lockean view of the purpose of government, the securing of man’s natural universal rights.<sup>97</sup> Governments that fail in this task, as the Somali government had evidently failed, forfeit their rights of sovereignty and are thereby justly occupied. The American media is supportive of the intervention and lends legitimacy to the idea of universal human rights –natural rights- as the criteria of just governance and the right to rule.

Despite these elements, the meaning of the American news media’s representation of the idea of the state is ultimately not found in the tradition of social contract theory. The social contract tradition presents a vision of the state as a collective of individuals. David Mapel writes: ‘Contractarianism is an individualistic political tradition, then, not in the sense that it necessarily posits ‘atomistic’ individuals who have no social ties, but in the sense that it rejects any ideal of a natural or organic relationship between individuals and the community’.<sup>98</sup> Lacking any ties of tradition, or religion, or culture, or language, individuals seemingly enter the state only due its ability to provide a procedural measure of justice. This is, of course, itself a shared value among these individuals to a certain

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<sup>97</sup> Fernando R. Teson, ‘The liberal case for humanitarian intervention’, in J.L. Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane (eds) *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal and Political Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): p.108.

<sup>98</sup> Mapel, ‘The Contractarian Tradition’, p. 186.

vision of morality. Social contract theory lays out a very strong position for the right to rule as based only upon consent, which in turn explains its endurance as a model of the state in Western politics. It is not, however, seen to derive from any perspective within a community, but rather emanates from the reason of individuals. The society of states is envisioned as a functional expression of various national social contracts by liberals, but this begs the question of why it is not suggested, then, to conduct a contractual relationship on an international scale between states or between individuals?<sup>99</sup> This is not the meaning conveyed by the media's representations. For example, the notion of the American news media suggesting that Somalis, now lacking a social contract, integrating into the United States on a contractual basis is absurd, despite the benefits this would achieve in securing natural rights for individual Somalis. Indeed, even the notion of trusteeship, rarely expressed as a potential policy in the media's representations, looks to the future restoration of a Somali state rather than a new form of contract with another state. The meaning given to borders is not merely functional but the expression of moral difference and the relevance of state borders to the realization of human autonomy. The state is given meaning as the product of culture, not contract, in the American news media's representations, and is best expressed in the Hegelian idea of the state.

### *Hegel and the Ethical State*

Hegel's theory of the state was highly critical of the 'mechanical' idea of the liberal state.<sup>100</sup> He saw in the liberal vision of the state's role based on property and self-interest both a political vision that atomized community and a theory that failed to explain how a state actually functions.<sup>101</sup> Hegel argued that if the state relied only on the rational self-interest of individuals it would not be able to carry out taxation or military campaigns effectively. A rationally self-interested individual would work to secure their property and get out of harm's way in a conflict, but as Shlomo Avineri outlined,

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<sup>99</sup> This is the critique frequently made of liberal contract positions. See Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989): pp.240-243, for an example of a critique of John Rawls notion of self-contained societies as the basis of social contracts.

<sup>100</sup> Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Modern Theory of the State*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973): p.15.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, pp.11, 134-135.



That men in fact usually behave otherwise, and even find fault in such 'rational' behaviour, clearly indicates that they relate to the state in a way different to that of mere self-interest. The mode of universal altruism, the readiness to put up sacrifices on behalf of the other, the consciousness of solidarity and community – these, for Hegel, are the ties binding a person to what is commonly called his country or his state.<sup>102</sup>

Hegel argues that the state does not and cannot function as the product of a contractual agreement of individuals. Instead, he develops an argument along empirical, but more importantly, ethical lines to assert the weakness of the social contractarian position. For Hegel and fellow communitarians the abstract propositions of liberalism inaccurately divorce human beings from their social context. While this is a theoretical weakness, it is more importantly a normative weakness in liberal arguments. Individuals and their ethical values can only be constituted through social relationships and in the context of their communities which impart these values.<sup>103</sup> For an individual to achieve consciousness of their being –to be constituted as an individual - they must recognize other individuals as similar beings from whom they are separate but stand in relation to. Individual morality cannot be the product of an abstracted freedom provided by natural law, as the situatedness of human life inevitably places people into a constrained ethical relationship with others. This recognition provides the fundamental basis for ethical relationships within communities, as citizens recognize each other as such within the context of their social relationships. While expressed most clearly in the idea of the ancient polis, Hegel argued that the form of the modern state may allow for the reconstruction of politics along these lines.<sup>104</sup> Further, the development of human consciousness is also the development of human reason, which does not exist independently in the world. The state, as the vehicle in which individuals recognize their consciousness, is also the vehicle in which reason develops in history; reason as the expression of human autonomy is also the expression of human freedom, and thus for

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.135.

<sup>103</sup> Chris Brown, *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf 1992): p.62; Frost, *Ethics*, p. 138.

<sup>104</sup> Avineri, *Hegel's*, p. 20.

Hegel the state is the ultimate expression of human freedom.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the process of reason embodied in the state means that the state itself is a condition for human knowledge in the present, so that 'the present also signifies that statehood has become an inescapable part of the modern condition and the sole source of its intelligibility'.<sup>106</sup> The state in a Hegelian perspective is thereby an immutable condition of human social relationships, its place in history expressed not as a social and historical product but as a natural outcome of the development and enablement of reason and history in time. It is the ethical end point of human development and represents the end of history. The settled norms of international society, sovereignty and non-intervention, may thereby be viewed as an expression of the Hegelian ethics as they are geared to the preservation and maintenance of the society of states and each state within it.<sup>107</sup>

The Hegelian perspective of the state is the idea of the state that most strongly correlates with the American news media's representations. This view is conveyed in a number of ways. As noted, the news print media is oriented to national societies as their target market. In choosing stories, and in the angle taken on such stories, the American news media participates in the construction and consolidation of intersubjective meanings within a territorially bounded framework. At the same time, this process of recognition of America as a coherent nation-state with shared values also helps to construct other political communities as objects of difference that require recognition if the United States is to be constituted itself as a state. The state is not conceived or conveyed as a collection of individuals in the news media's representations in the manner of a contract theory of the state, but as a holistic entity with elements of personhood, a Hegelian picture of the state.<sup>108</sup> The news media speaks of the intervention by 'America' and the crisis of 'Somalia' as people, as holistic entities. By projecting its audience as a nation within a

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, pp. 65, 125-126.

<sup>106</sup> Jens Bartelson, *The Critique of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): p.43.

<sup>107</sup> Frost, *Ethics*, pp.106-109. This perspective is also shared by certain authors influenced by the English School. See Bain, *Between Anarchy*, chapter 7, and Jackson, *Global Covenant*, chapter 15.

<sup>108</sup> Frost, *Ethics*, 151-155. For a discussion of the state as a person in IR theory, see Alexander Wendt, 'The state as a person in international theory', *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004): pp.289-316; Colin Wight, 'State agency: social action without human activity?', *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004): 269-280; and Peter Lomas, 'Anthropomorphism, personification and ethics: a reply to Alexander Wendt', *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005): 349-355.

particular territory the news media helps to construct a picture of world society as a society of states. The narratives chosen by the news media to tell their stories further enhance this picture. Stories are bracketed according to their relevance to an American audience. As citizens of a state, the media both presumes and suggests that American will be more interested in events concerning fellow citizens to whom they have a special ethical relationship than to outsiders of this community. In the discussion of the crisis in Somalia the news media's representations focused upon the stories of American troops and the American role in the crisis. The process of 'domestication' of international news facilitates the moral and ethical meanings that attach to the borders of states. This contributes to the notion of the state as a distinct ethical community, the picture of a Hegelian modern nation-state.

The differences between political communities expressed in the newspapers narrative and form are given a naturalistic meaning by the legitimacy granted to the news media. As noted, the news media is perceived as oriented towards truthful discourse, so that its construction of the United States as a natural community, through its emphasis on American stories and values, the technique of separating domestic and foreign news, and the like, is accepted as fact. The causal narrative the newspaper presents about the failure of the Somali state functions to reinforce the universal validity of the state as a form of political governance, attributing the failure of the Somali state to character flaws rather than its inappropriateness for Somali society. The state thus remains the template for ethical government, and Somalis are projected as underdeveloped in relation to the developed states of the West. Presumably the march of history and the assistance of outsiders will lead to the eventual stability of the Somali state in international society. The statist international order functions as the discursive background for the construction of the media's representations, and thereby reinforces the norms of sovereignty and non-intervention and the ethical values they suggest.

Ultimately, when considering the role of the news media's representations and the meaning that it projects about the state and the international system, the role of ritual is central. The American news media in the case discussed above performs a ritualistic task

in reaffirming the legitimacy and authority of the state, and reconfirming the place of individuals within it, their moral duties to outsiders, and the place of those outsiders in relation to each other. The American public is presented with a picture of obligations to those outside their community as based in charity, not duty. In the discourse of intervention in Somalia, the United States was not required to act, it acted out of altruism. This conception of morality perpetuates harm in international society and maintains structural inequalities. The media's representations are directly implicated in this situation. This process is achieved in two ways, laid out by Catherine Bell in her discussion of political ritual:

In general, political rites define power in a two-dimensional way: first, they use symbols and symbolic action to depict a group of people as a coherent and ordered community based on shared values and goals; second, they demonstrate the legitimacy of these values and goals by establishing their iconicity with the perceived values and order of the cosmos.<sup>109</sup>

The use of 'official' language, as outlined by Bourdieu, the split of news into domestic and foreign categories, the prominence of the state as a provider of news information, and the shared consumption of the newspaper on a daily basis function as symbols and symbolic action that depicts the United States as a coherent community. The process by which the news media is invested with authority and legitimacy transforms the meaning of its representations from a constructed perspective to a natural correspondence with truth and reality.<sup>110</sup> What occurs in these rituals is thereby a dual process. First is the meaning that the media grants to the state and international society as universal, natural, and legitimate, and second is the meaning that the media appropriates or creates on its own behalf, not as a functionary in this political ritual but as a conveyor of truth. The authority and legitimacy of the news media as currently configured relies on the legitimacy and authority conferred upon the state. Changing the relationship between these two institutions is a potential site of political change towards more inclusive forms of human political organization.

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<sup>109</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): p. 129.

<sup>110</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p.119.

## 5

### **Conclusion**

Critical approaches to media representation must look to integrate the role of symbolic capital and economic capital in analyses of the constitution of meaning.<sup>111</sup> The traditional concerns of Marxism with class and economic inequalities are linked intimately to the postmodern focus on the politics of difference and identity, and must not be considered independently.<sup>112</sup> While the social world is granted meaning through discourse, as outlined by current approaches to representation in IR, the intersubjective reality of social and economic structures works to alter the meaning of representations and must be considered in any study of the construction of common norms and values by the media. Structures of global capital that lead to the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few corporations are supported by the print media's orientation to national markets. Global capital works to undermine arguments about political and moral obligation that suggest structural change. The authority and legitimacy granted the media's representations are tied to these structures and their ability to dominate the public sphere. The result is what Habermas has termed the 'colonization of the lifeworld' by the forces of instrumental rationality, money and power interests.<sup>113</sup> This restricts the scope for developing an ethics of dialogue based upon communicative action. As a result, norms of political community within our lifeworlds are reflective of structures of social inequality that maintain the existing state of affairs in world politics. Ethical obligations are restricted in this view to members of the same political community. This permits indifference to the harm that such moral favouritism justifies as acceptable, and prevents the realization of an emancipatory world order.

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<sup>111</sup> Graham Murdock, 'Reconstructing the Ruined Tower: Contemporary Communications and Questions of Class' in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds) *Mass Media and Society, Third Edition*, (London: Hodder, 2000): pp.12-15.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 15. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): p. xiii.

<sup>113</sup> Martin Weber, 'The critical social theory of the Frankfurt School, and the "social turn" in IR', *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005): pp. 194-195.

The inquiry into the construction of our lifeworld conceptions of political community is a vital task for political theory and IR. Examining how we conceive of the state and international society on a daily basis outlines the scope of political possibilities that seem attainable within the ‘world within our reach’. There are two related aspects to this concern. First, as noted by critical IR approaches, the constitution of the state and international society as a system of states is vital in sustaining an exclusionary model of politics that actively harms ‘outsiders’ in the international system.<sup>114</sup> Secondly, the manner in which we envision and discuss political community has a significant impact on the range of political actions we may deem as legitimate. The recent neo-conservative moment in American foreign policy is indicative of such ties between political theory, media representation, and political action.<sup>115</sup> The ability of these theorists to present a liberal social contract theory of the state as the criteria of judgment for Saddam Hussein’s regime, for example, has been central to the justifications offered for the war in Iraq and its public support.

This work has attempted to outline the shape of how IR theory may approach this inquiry. It has outlined the importance of the news media as an institution producing consumables according to a set work culture, and the centrality of this in restricting debate and meaning. It has drawn out the role of the newspaper in constructing the nation-state as natural and spatially universal. It has illustrated the effects of these processes on the meaning given to state failure in Somalia. And it has outlined the norms of political community this discloses as Hegelian, and the moral and ethical values that attach to this conception of the ‘rules of the game’. In this process, however, some aspects of inquiry have been glossed over. The relationship between media texts and audience receptions has been acknowledge but sidelined, a potentially rich vein of future empirical work. The potential for resisting the influence of instrumental rationality within the public sphere has only been tangentially mentioned, and requires a great deal more thought and reflection. Despite these shortcomings, the promise of such work is evident and valuable for critical international relations theory.

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<sup>114</sup> Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community*, pp. 19-27.

<sup>115</sup> See Michael C. Williams, ‘What is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 11(2005): pp.308-310.

If we are to move beyond the ethics of particularism, to denaturalize the Hegelian moral community of the state, it is vital to question the manner in which the news media presents these concepts. The role of the media as a central site of debate and discussion with our public spheres, national and global, requires intellectual engagement. If we are to construct a cosmopolis, a global community of citizens engaged in dialogue free from exclusion and repression, we need to consider how these public spheres are currently constituted, and how they constrain the transformation of political community, and how they may offer avenues for change. The theoretical and empirical evaluation of the news media's role in presenting the world to us as a national audience is an important step in this process.

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